



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF VICTIM ADVOCATE

505 HUDSON STREET, HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106

Michelle S. Cruz, Esq.
State Victim Advocate

**Testimony of Michelle Cruz, State Victim Advocate
Submitted to the Labor and Public Employees Committee
Tuesday, February 10, 2009**

Good afternoon Senator Prague, Representative Ryan and distinguished members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. For the record, my name is Michelle Cruz and I am the Victim Advocate for the State of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony concerning:

Raised House Bill No. 6188, An Act Concerning State Employees and Violence and Bullying in the Workplace (Proposed Amendment)

In 1996, Connecticut citizens overwhelmingly supported passage of the Victims' Rights Amendment to our state constitution. Among the constitutional rights of crime victims is the right to be reasonably protected from the accused, the right to participate in the criminal justice process and the right to have access to information. In addition, Connecticut has become a leader across the country for the advancement of crime victims' rights. One such advancement was the creation of the Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) in 1999. The OVA's primary responsibility is to protect and promote the rights of crime victims in Connecticut.

The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health found that homicide accounted for 12% of job-related deaths from 1980 – 1988. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported that homicide was the leading cause of death for women at work. In addition, BLS reported that, after motor vehicle incidents, homicide is the leading cause of death in the workplace; 1004 workers murdered on the job in 1992.

In some instances of workplace violence, there may be an arrest as a result of an individual's behavior towards another. It is critical for human resource professionals within the state agency workforce to recognize and understand that the victim of the workplace violence has significant constitutional rights in the event that law enforcement officials are contacted, resulting in a pending criminal action. It is important to ensure that the victim of the workplace violence not be denied access to information about the aggressor or denied the right to exercise their constitutional rights as a crime victim.

Accordingly, I would respectfully request that the committee consider amending Section 1 and 3 of the proposal to include the Victim Advocate, or his or her designee, among those responsible for establishing policies and procedures for preventing, reporting, evaluating and investigating complaints of workplace violence and abusive conduct to ensure that the constitutional rights of crime victims are protected.

Thank you for consideration of my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle S. Cruz
Michelle Cruz, Esq.
State Victim Advocate